

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-14 PM-03 SP-02 L-01 INR-05 IO-06
MCT-01 DHA-05 H-01 /047 W
-----037142 201032Z /11
P 200956Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8436
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN PRIORITY
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 15622

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EI, UK
SUBJECT: SECRETARY MASON ON NI AND U.S. TRIP

REF: A) BELFAST 286; B) DUBLIN 2222

1. I LUNCHEONED WITH NI SECRETARY ROY MASON SEPTEMBER 13, AND DURING THE LUNCHEON HE DISCUSSED HIS RECENT SPEECH (REFTELS) IN SOME DETAIL. HE SOUGHT TO USE THE OCCASION TO REAFFIRM HMG'S INTENT TO REMAIN IN NI AND ITS COMMITMENT TO SOME KIND OF POWER-SHARING ARRANGEMENT AND TO NUDGE ULSTER'S POLITICIANS TOWARDS ACCOMMODATION. HE STRESSED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE NO "SECRET DEAL" WITH THE ULSTER UNIONISTS, REAFFIRMING WHAT HE SAID IN THE SPEECH. HE POINTED OUT THAT HE HAD TAKEN GREAT CARE TO ENSURE LEADER OF COMMONS MICHAEL FOOT MADE THIS POINT CLEAR WHEN HE ANNOUNCED THE SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE ON NI REPRESENTATION TO PARLIAMENT, AND EVEN ARRANGED FOR BACKBENCH QUESTIONS THAT WOULD DRAW FOOT OUT ON THIS
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POINT. SDLP LEADER GERRY FITT, HE SAID, WAS WELL AWARE THAT THERE WAS NO DEAL, BUT DID NOT FEEL IT POLITIC TO CARRY THE MESSAGE TO NI'S CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OR EVEN TO THE SDLP. MASON, ACCORDINGLY, IS DISAPPOINTED IN FITT.

2. WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE WAS WELCOMED BY THE UNIONISTS BECAUSE IT SEEMED TO

STRENGTHEN NI'S TIES WITH THE REST OF THE UK, MASON ALSO POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS A POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SDLP. WITH INCREASED REPRESENTATION, HE SAID, THE SDLP STANDS TO GET A MORE EQUITABLE SHARE OF NI'S REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT (THERE ARE NOW TWO CATHOLIC MPS, BUT THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY CONSTITUTES NEARLY A THIRD OF THE ELECTORATE). MASON BELIEVES THE SDLP SHOULD WORK WITHIN THE SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE (MASON ENSURED FITT WAS INCLUDED IN THE CONFERENCE) TO INCREASE NI'S REPRESENTATION TO A LEVEL COMPARABLE TO THAT OF SCOTLAND, WHICH IS THE MOST OVER-REPRESENTED PART OF THE UK. IN THIS WAY, THEIR POLITICAL WEIGHT COULD BE INCREASED BOTH IN WESTMINSTER AND IN NI.

3. COMMENT: MASON, OF COURSE, NEGLECTED TO MENTION THAT BY CONVENING THE SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE THE GOVERNMENT NEUTRALIZED SIX OF THE UNIONISTS' 10 VOTES IN A CONFIDENCE SITUATION -- THEY WON'T VOTE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT UNTIL THE ADDITIONAL SEATS ARE IN HAND. THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, DOES NOT NEED THE UNIONISTS TO SURVIVE, THOUGH THEIR SIX VOTES DO REPRESENT A FORM OF POLITICAL INSURANCE IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THE PACT WITH THE LIBERALS SHOULD COLLAPSE. IT ALSO IMPROVES THE CHANCES THE SCOTLAND AND WALES DEVOLUTION BILL WILL PASS NEXT TIME AROUND, WHILE INCREASED NI REPRESENTATION PROVIDES AN ANSWER TO THOSE WHO CALL FOR A REDUC-

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TION IN REPRESENTATION FROM SCOTLAND AND WALES IF AND

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ACTION EUR-08

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8437
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN PRIORITY
AMCONSUL BELFAST

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WHEN THE DEVOLUTION BILL IS PASSED. END COMMENT.

3. TOUCHING BRIEFLY ON THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ON NI, MASON SAID HE FELT IT HAD BEEN USEFUL, AND NOTED THAT MOST ELEMENTS OF THE NI COMMUNITY HAD RESPONDED POSITIVELY. HE BELIEVES, HOWEVER, THAT BOTH WE AND HMG SHOULD AVOID ANY ACTION WHICH MIGHT STIMULATE SPECULATION OF A NEW OR FURTHER AMERICAN INITIATIVE IN NI.

4. REGARDING HIS OCTOBER 10 TRIP TO THE U.S., MASON SAID HIS PRINCIPAL PURPOSE WILL BE TO STIMULATE ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT IN THE PROVINCE. ALTHOUGH HE PLANS TO INCLUDE WASHINGTON ON HIS ITINERARY -- THE PROGRAM IS BEING ARRANGED BY AMBASSADOR JAY -- MASON SAID HE WISHED TO AVOID FURTHER SPECULATION ABOUT A U.S. INITIATIVE. HOWEVER, HE EXPECTS TO SEE SENATOR KENNEDY AND WOULD BE WILLING TO MEET INFORMALLY WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS OR HOUSE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEES. HE DID NOT MENTION ANY CONFIDENTIAL

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PLANS TO CALL IN AT THE DEPARTMENT, BUT WOULD NO DOUBT BE HAPPY TO DO SO.

5. COMMENT: IT SEEMS TO ME THAT AN INFORMAL COFFEE SESSION WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS COULD BE USEFUL. MASON, BEING A POLITICAL LEADER OF SOME STATURE, WOULD CARRY GREAT AUTHORITY ON THE HILL, AND HIS COMMAND OF HIS BRIEF MIGHT ENABLE HIM TO BROADEN PERSPECTIVE OF SOME OF THOSE FEW ON THE HOUSE COMMITTEE WHO STILL SEEM TO SEE NI THROUGH IRISH-AMERICAN CAUCUS GLASSES. IF HM'S EMBASSY SHOULD REQUEST AN APPOINTMENT IN THE DEPARTMENT FOR MASON, I WOULD URGE THAT HE BE RECEIVED AT AN APPROPRIATELY HIGH LEVEL, BUT BELIEVE A MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY MIGHT TRIGGER FURTHER SPECULATION ABOUT FURTHER U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN NI.

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